

The Porter's Son

Hans Christian Andersen

The General's family lived on the first floor, and the Porter's family lived in the cellar. There was a vast distance between them - the whole first floor, as well as all the grades of society; but both families lived under the same roof, and their windows looked out in the same street and the same garden.

In this garden there was a blooming acacia - whenever it did bloom - and sometimes the smartly dressed nurse would sit under it with the still more smartly dressed child, the General's "Little Emilie."

The Porter's little son, with his dark hair and large brown eyes, used to dance barefoot before them; and the little girl would laugh and stretch her tiny hands out to him. And if the General saw this from his window he would nod down at them and say, "*Charmant!*" The General's wife, who was so young that she might almost have been her husband's daughter by an earlier marriage, never herself looked out into the yard; but she had given orders that the Porter's boy could play near her own child, but never touch it. And the nurse strictly carried out the lady's orders.

The sun shone in upon those who dwelt on the first floor and those who lived in the cellar. The acacia put out its blossoms, they fell away, and new ones came the next year. The tree bloomed, and the Porter's little son bloomed; he looked like a fresh tulip.

The General's little daughter grew to be a delicate child, as dainty as the rosy petal of the acacia blossom. Now she seldom sat under the tree, for she took the fresh air in a carriage. She went with her mother on drives, and always nodded to the Porter's son, George; yes, and even kissed her fingers toward him, till her mother told her she was now too grown-up for that.

One morning he had to bring the General some papers and mail that had been left in the Porter's room. He had mounted the staircase and was passing the door of the broom closet when he heard a peep from inside it. He thought perhaps it was a stray chicken chirping, but it was the General's little daughter, dressed in muslin and lace.

"Don't tell Papa and Mamma, for they would be angry!"

"What's the matter, little lady?" asked George.

"It's all burning everywhere!" she said. "It's in full blaze!"

George flung open the door to the little nursery, where the window curtain was nearly all burned; the curtain rod had caught fire and was flaming! Quickly he sprang forward, pulled it down, and called for help: without him the whole house would have caught fire.

The General and his wife questioned Little Emilie.

"I just took only one single match," she said, "and that lighted up and then the whole curtain lighted up! I spit to put out the fire; I spit all I could, but I didn't have enough spit, so I came out and hid, 'cause I knew Papa and Mamma would be angry!"

"Spit!" said the General. "What sort of word is that? "When did you ever hear your papa or your mamma talk of spitting? You must have learned that word downstairs!"

But little George received a penny. It didn't go to the candy store, but into his savings bank, and there were soon so many pennies there that he could buy himself a paintbox and color his drawings.

He had many of these drawings, for they seemed to come out of his very pencil and finger

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tips. He presented the first colored pictures to Little Emilie.

"*Charmant!*" said the General.

The General's wife admitted that it was quite clear what the little one meant in his pictures.

"There's genius in him!"

Those were the words the Porter's wife brought back down into the cellar.

The General and his lady were of the nobility; they had two coats of arms on their carriage, one for each of them. The lady had a crest worked on every piece of clothing, inside and outside, in her nightcap, and even on her night cover. This, her own coat of arms, was an expensive one, bought by her father for bright dollars, for he hadn't been born with it, and neither had she.

She had come into the world seven years before the crest, a fact that was remembered by most people, though forgotten by the family. The General's coat of arms was old and large; one's back might well creak with dignity of this one alone, to say nothing of the two of them. And there was indeed a creaking in the lady's back when she drove stiff and stately to the court balls.

The General was old and gray, but he knew how to sit on a horse, and rode out every day, with a groom at a respectful distance behind him. When he arrived at a party it was as if he had ridden into the room on his high horse, and he wore so many decorations that it was almost unbelievable, but that was by no means his fault. When a very young man he had performed military duties by taking part in the great autumnal war games that used to be held in times of peace. He always told an anecdote of those days - his only one. The officer under him cut off and captured one of the princes; and the prince and his little troop, all prisoners like himself, had to ride back to towns behind the General. It was an event never to be forgotten, and the General told it again and again, year after year, always ending with the remarkable words he had spoken when he returned the prince's sword to him: "Only my subaltern officer could have made your Royal Highness a prisoner; I - never!" Whereupon the prince had answered, "You are incomparable!"

The General had never seen active service, for when war came to his native land he went on diplomatic missions, through three foreign countries. He spoke French until he had almost forgotten his own language; he danced beautifully, and he rode well; decorations blossomed on his blouse in indescribable abundance; sentinels presented arms to him; one of the prettiest of the girls presented herself to him - and became his wife. And they had a lovely little girl, so pretty that she seemed to have fallen from heaven; and the Porter's son danced in the garden before her as soon as she was old enough to take notice, and gave her all his colored drawings; and she looked at them and was so delighted with them that she tore them to pieces. She was so beautiful and charming.

"My rose petal!" said the General's wife. "You were born to be the bride of a prince!"

The prince was already standing outside the door, but no one knew it. People can't see much farther than the doorstep.

"The other day our boy shared his bread and butter with her," said the Porter's wife. "There was neither cheese nor meat with it, but she enjoyed it every bit as much as roast beef. There'd have been a fine hullabaloo if the General and his wife had seen that little party, but they didn't!"

George had shared his bread and butter with Little Emilie, and gladly would he have shared his very heart with her, if only it would have pleased her. He was a good boy, wide-awake and intelligent, and now he was studying drawing at the evening school at the academy. Little Emilie, too, was advancing in learning; she talked French and had a dancing master.

"George is going to be confirmed at Easter," said the Porter's wife. That was how far George was advanced.

"It would be very sensible to have him serve an apprenticeship," said the father; "in some good profession, of course; and then we would have him out of the house!"

"But he could come home at nights to sleep," said the mother.

"It wouldn't be easy to find a master who had a spare room. And we'd have to give him clothes, too; the little food he eats now we can easily afford to give him; he is happy with a couple of boiled potatoes; then he has his teaching free. Just let him go on the way he is, and he'll turn out a blessing to us, you may be sure! Didn't the professor say so?"

The confirmation clothes were ready. Mother did the sewing herself, but the cloth had been cut by the tailor, and he knew how to cut it. The Porter's wife said that if he had only been better placed, and could have opened a shop with apprentices, he could have become court tailor.

Yes, the clothes were ready, and the candidate was ready. On confirmation day George received a great pocket watch from his godfather, the flax dealer's old clerk, the wealthiest of George's godfathers. The watch was old and honored; it was always a little fast, but that's better than being too slow. It was a precious present. And from the General's there came a hymnbook bound in leather, sent by the little lady to whom George had given his pictures. On the flyleaf were written his name and her name as "his gracious well-wisher." This was written according to the dictation of the General's wife, and the General himself had read it through and said, "*Charmant!*"

"That was really a great courtesy from a family of such rank," said the Porter's wife. And George would have to go upstairs, in his confirmation clothes and carrying his hymnbook, to thank them.

The General's wife had a number of compresses on her head, for she had one of her bad headaches, which always came when she was bored. She looked very kindly at George and wished him the best of luck and none of her headaches.

The General was wearing his dressing gown, with a tasseled cap and red-legged Russian boots. He paced up and down the floor three times, engrossed in his own thoughts and memories. Then he stood still and said, "So now little George is a Christian man! Let him be also an honest man, paying due respect to his government! Someday, when you are old, you can say the General taught you that sentence." That was a much longer speech than the General usually made; and he returned to his inner thoughts and looked impressive.

But George heard and saw little of all that up there; nothing remained fixed in his memory so firmly as little Miss Emilie. How lovely she was, and how gentle; how she flitted about, and how delicate she was! If one should draw her portrait it would have to be in a soap bubble. There was a fragrance about her clothing and her curly blonde hair as if she were a rosebush that had just burst into bloom. And he had once shared his bread and butter with her, and she had eaten it with a huge appetite and smiled at him with every second mouthful. Could she possibly still remember it? Surely she did; it was in memory of this that she had given him the beautiful hymnbook.

And so, on New Year's Day, just as the new moon of the new year rose, he went out-of-doors with a loaf and a shilling and opened the book at random to see what hymn should appear. It was a song of praise and thanksgiving. Then he opened it again to see what should come forth for Little Emilie. He tried very hard not to dip into the part of the book containing the funeral hymns, but in spite of his care he *did* dip in between death and the grave. You couldn't believe in that sort of thing - not in the least! And yet he was terribly frightened when soon afterward the dainty little girl was laid up with sickness and the

doctor's carriage came to the street door daily.

"They won't be able to keep her," said the Porter's wife. "Our Lord knows very well whom He wants."

But they kept her, and George sent her pictures he drew. He drew the Czar's palace, the ancient Kremlin in Moscow, exactly as it was, with turrets and cupolas; in George's drawing they looked like big green and gilt cucumbers. Little Emilie was so pleased that during the week George sent her several more pictures, all of buildings, because that would give her plenty to think about, wondering what went on inside the doors and windows.

He drew a Chinese house, with bells hanging on all the sixteen stories. He drew two Greek temples, with steps around slender marble pillars. He drew a Norwegian church; you could see it was made entirely of timbers, deeply carved and curiously put together; every story looked as if it had rockers. But the most beautiful design of all was a castle, which he called "Little Emilie's." This was to be her own home, so George had made it all up from his imagination and selected for it whatever seemed prettiest in each of the other buildings. It had the carved beams of the Norwegian church, the marble pillars of the Greek temples, bells on every story, and green and gilded cupolas on the top, like those on the Czar's Kremlin. It was a true child's castle! And under every window was written what took place in that hall or that room: "Here Emilie sleeps": "Here Emilie dances"; and "Here she is to play 'visitors coming.'" It was amusing to look at, and you may be sure it was looked at. "*Charmant!*" said the General.

But the old Count - for there was an old count, of even greater distinction than the General, with a castle and a mansion of his own - said nothing. They had told him that all this had been imagined and drawn by the little son of the Porter. Not that the boy was so very little now; indeed, he had been confirmed. The old Count looked carefully at the pictures and had his own long, quiet thoughts about them.

One gray, damp, and dismal morning proved one of the brightest and best days for little George. The professor at the art academy sent for him.

"Listen, my friend," he said. "Let's have a little talk together. Our Lord has favored you with good talent; now He's favoring you with good friends. The old Count in the corner house has spoken to me about you. I have seen your pictures, too; frankly, those we can cross out, for there would be too much to correct in them. From now on you may come twice a week to my drawing school, and so in time you'll learn to do better. I believe there is more of the architect in you than of the painter. You will have time to think about this, but now go up right away to the old Count on the corner and thank the good Lord for such a friend."

It was a great mansion, that corner house! Carved figures of elephants and camels of the olden days were around the windows, but the Count was fonder of modern times, and anything good they brought, whether from drawing room, cellar, or garret.

"I believe," said the Porter's wife, "that the grander folks really are the less stuck-up they are. How kind and plain the old Count is! And he can talk just like you and me! You won't find that at the General's. There was George yesterday, head over heels with delight, because the Count treated him so graciously; and I'm much the same way today, after talking with that great man. Wasn't it lucky now that we didn't have George serve and apprenticeship? That boy has talent."

"But he must have outside help," said the father.

"Well, he's got that help now," said the mother. "The Count spoke right out, plain and honest."

"But it was at the General's that it was all started," said the father. "We must thank them,

too."

"We can do that, too, " said the mother, "though there's not much to thank them for, in my opinion. I'll thank our Lord first of all, and thank Him all the more now that Little Emilie is getting better again."

Emilie kept getting better, and George kept getting better; inside of a year he won the small silver medal, and later the large one.

"It would have been better, after all, if he had learned a trade!" said the Porter's wife, and cried. "We would have kept him here then. Why does he have to go off to Rome? I shall never see him any more, even if he comes home again, and that he'll never do, the sweet child!"

"But it's to his good fortune and glory," said the father.

"An, it's all very well to talk that way, my friend!" said the mother. "You talk, but you don't mean a word of it. You're just as heartbroken as I am!"

And it was all true, both about the sorrow and the departure. It was, however, a great piece of luck for the young man, said everyone.

And then there was a round of farewells, also at the General's. His wife did not appear, for she had one of her bad headaches. At parting the General related his only anecdote - what he had said to the prince, and how the prince had replied to him, "You are incomparable!" Then he gave George his hand, a flabby old hand.

Emilie gave George her hand, too, and looked almost sad; but George was the saddest.

Time passes, when one is busy, but it also passes when one is idle. The time is equally long, though not equally profitable. It was profitable to George, and never seemed long, except when he thought of those at home and how they were getting along, in the drawing room and in the cellar. Yes, he had news of them, and a great deal may be folded up in a letter - bright sunshine and dark, heavy days. One letter told that his father had died, and so his mother was alone now. Emilie had been an angel of comfort at the time, having come down to her, wrote his mother. And as for herself, she added, she had received permission to keep her husband's job.

The General's wife kept a diary; in it were entered every ball, every party, she had attended, every visit she had paid or received. The diary was illustrated with the cards of diplomats and other noblemen. She was very proud of her diary; it increased in size season after season, through many great headaches, but also through many bright evenings - that is, court balls.

Emilie went to her first court ball. Her mother wore pink, with black Spanish lace, while Emilie's dress was white, so fine and pure! Green ribbons fluttered like leaves in her curly blonde locks, and she was crowned with a wreath of white water lilies. Her eyes were so blue and clear, her mouth so beautiful and red; she looked like a little mermaid, as beautiful as you could imagine. Three princes danced with her; that is, one after the other. Her mother had no headache for a week.

But the first ball wasn't the last of the season. The pace became too much for Emilie, and so it was well that summer brought rest and a change of air. The family was invited to the old Count's castle.

The garden of this castle was worth seeing. A part of it was quite old-fashioned, with stiff green hedges, where one seemed to be walking between green screens pierced with peepholes. Box trees and yew trees were clipped into stars and pyramids; water sprang from fountains set with cockleshells; on all sides stood figures made of the heaviest stone, as one could plainly tell from both the clothes and the faces; each flower bed had its own device - a fish, a heraldic shield, or a monogram. This was the French part of the garden.

From this section one seemed to emerge into the free, natural woods, where the trees could grow as they wished, and therefore, grew great and splendid. The grass was green and could be walked on; it was mowed, rolled, and well cared for. This was the English half of the garden.

"Old times and modern times," said the Count. "They meet here with loving embraces! In a couple of years the house itself will take on its proper importance. It will be a complete change into something handsomer and better. I'll show you the plans, and I'll even show you the architect; he is coming to dinner."

"*Charmant!*" said the General.

"This garden is paradise!" said the General's wife. "And over there you have a baronial castle!"

"Oh, that's my henhouse," replied the Count. "The pigeons live in the tower, and the turkeys on the first floor, but old Else reigns in the parlor. She has guest rooms all around her, one for the sitting hens, one for the hens and chickens, while the ducks have their own outlet to the water."

"*Charmant!*" repeated the General, and they all went to see this fine place.

Old Else stood in the middle of the parlor, and beside her stood the architect - George! After so many years, he and Little Emilie met again - in the henhouse! Yes, there he stood, and he was a handsome figure to look at, his face frank and firm, his hair black and shiny, and in the corners of his mouth a little smile that said, "There's a little imp behind my ear who knows all about you, outside and inside!" Old Else had taken off her wooden shoes and stood in her stocking feet, out of respect for her illustrious visitors. And the hens clucked, and the cock crowed, while the ducks waddled along, tap, tap, tap.

But the pale, slender girl, his childhood friend, the General's daughter, stood before George with her otherwise pallid cheeks now blushing like the rose, her eyes wide, and her lips speaking without uttering a syllable. Such was his greeting - the sweetest that any young man could hope for from a young lady, unless they were of the same family or had often danced together; she and the architect had never danced together.

The Count took his hand and presented him, saying, "He's not a perfect stranger, our young friend, Mr. George."

The General's wife curtsied; her daughter was about to offer her hand, but drew it back.

"Our little Mr. George!" said the General. "We're old housefriends; *charmant!*"

"You have become quite an Italian," said his wife, and I presume you speak the language now like a native."

The General's wife could sing in Italian but not speak it, said the General.

At the dinner table George sat at Emilie's right side. The General had escorted her, while the Count had escorted the General's wife. George talked, and told anecdotes, which he could tell well. He was the life of the party, though the old Count could have been, too, had he wanted to be.

Emilie sat silently; her ears listened, her eyes sparkled - but she said nothing.

Then she and George stood among the flowers, behind a screen of roses on the veranda, and again it was left to him to begin speaking.

"Thank you for your kindness to my old mother," he said. "I know that on the night of my father's death you went down and stayed with her till his eyes had closed. Thank you!" Then he raised her hand and kissed it, as was proper on such an occasion. She blushed, becoming rosy red, but pressed his hand in return and gazed at him with tender blue eyes.

"Your mother was a loving soul, and she was so fond of you. She let me read all your letters, so I almost feel I know you. And I remember how kind you were to me when I was little. You gave me pictures - -"

"Which you tore to pieces," said George.

"No, I still have my own castle left - I mean the drawing of it."

"And now I must really build it!" said George, and grew quite excited himself as he said it.

In their own rooms the General and his wife talked about the Porter's son. Why, he knew how to carry himself and to speak with knowledge and refinement. "He could be a tutor," said the General.

"Genius!" said the General's wife, and that was all she did say.

Often during those fine summer days George came to the castle of the Count. They missed him when he didn't come.

"How much more our Lord has given to you than to us ordinary beings!" Emilie said to him. "Are you grateful for it now?"

George was flattered that this beautiful young girl should look up to him. He found her very gifted.

And the General was more and more convinced that Mr. George could hardly have been a real child of the cellar. "However, his mother was a mighty fine woman," he said; "I owe her that sentence as an epitaph!"

Summer passed, winter came, and there was still more to tell about Mr. George. He had received attention and favor in the highest of all highest places. The General had met him at the court ball!

And now there was a ball planned at home for Little Emilie. Could Mr. George be invited?

"Whom the King invites, the General can invite!" said the General, drawing himself up a good inch higher.

So Mr. George was invited, and he came. And princes and counts came, and each danced better than the other. But Emilie danced only the first dance, for during that she strained her ankle, not seriously but painfully, so she had to stop dancing and watch the others. And there she sat, looking on, while the architect stood beside her.

"You're giving her the whole of St. Peter's Church at Rome!"

said the General as he passed, smiling like good humor itself.

A few days later he received Mr. George with the same smile of good humor. The young man had come to thank him for the ball, of course, and had he anything else to say? Yes - and the most surprising, astonishing, insane words were uttered by him. The General could hardly believe his ears. A preposterous declamation, an unbelievable proposition! Mr. George actually asked for Emilie as his wife!

"Man!" said the General as he began to boil. "I cannot understand you! What are you saying? What do you want? I don't know you! Sir! Fellow! You come and break into my house! Am I to remain here or am I not?" And then he backed into his bedroom, turned the key, and let Mr George stand alone. He stood there for a few moments, then turned around and left.

In the hallway he met Emilie. "What did my father say?" she asked in a trembling voice.

George pressed her hand. "He ran away from me - a better time will come."

There were tears in Emilie's eyes, while in the young man's were courage and confidence; the sun shone in upon them both and blessed them.

In his bedroom the General sat boiling; yes, still boiling - and then he boiled over and spluttered, "Lunacy! Porter madness!"

Inside of an hour the General's wife had heard it all from the General himself, and she sent for Emilie, to be alone with her. "Poor girl," she said. "To think of his insulting you like that, insulting all of us! I see there are tears in yours eyes; they're quite becoming to you. You really look charming in tears; you remind me of myself on my wedding day. Go ahead, cry, Little Emilie."

"Yes, that I certainly shall," said Emilie, "unless you and Papa say 'yes!'"

"Child!" cried the General's wife. "You're ill! You're delirious, and I'm getting one of my dreadful headaches! Oh, the miseries, that are descending upon our house! Don't let you mother die, Emilie, because then you'll have no mother!" And her eyes filled with tears; she couldn't bear to consider her own death.

Among the notices of appointments to be read in the news paper was the following: "Mr. George has been appointed Professor, 5th Class, No. 8."

"What a shame his father and mother are dead and can't read that!" said the new porters who now lived in the cellar under the General. They knew that the Professor had been born and brought up within those four walls.

"Now he'll have to pay the title tax!" said the man.

"Now, isn't that a lot for a poor child!" said the wife.

"Eighteen rix-dollars a year!" said the man. "Yes, that's a lot of money."

"No, I'm talking about the title!" said the wife. "You don't suppose having to pay the tax will worry him! He can earn that money many times over, and he'll probably marry a rich wife as well. If we had children, husband, a child of ours would also be an architect and a professor!"

Thus George was well spoken of in the cellar. He was well spoken of on the first floor, too; the old Count took good care of that.

It was the old drawings from his childhood days that presented an occasion for speaking about him. But how did these come to be mentioned? There was talk of Russia and Moscow, and so, of course, this

brought one right to the Kremlin, of which little George had made that drawing for little Miss Emilie. How many pictures he used to draw! There was one the Count especially remembered - "Little Emilie's Castle," with signs showing where she slept, where she danced, and where she played "visitors coming." Yes, the Professor had great talent. He might someday become an old privy councilor - that wasn't at all unlikely - and build a real castle for the young lady before he died; why not?

"That was a strange form of gaiety," said the General's wife after the Count had gone. The General nodded thoughtfully, and then went out riding, with the groom a respectful distance behind him, and he sat prouder than ever on his high horse.

Little Emilie's birthday brought cards and notes, books and flowers. The General Kissed her on the brow, and his wife kissed her on the lips. They were loving parents, and both they and Emilie were honored with noble visitors - even two of the princes. Then there was much talk about balls and theaters, about diplomatic embassies, and the governments of kingdoms and empires. Then the talk turned on rising young men, and native talent, and this brought the name of the young Professor into the conversation - Mr. Architect George.

"He is building for immortality," someone said. "And meanwhile he is building himself into one of the first families!"

"One of the first families!" repeated the General when he was alone with his wife. "Which

one of our first families!"

"I can guess which was meant," said the General's wife. "But I won't speak of it or even think about it. God may have ordained it so, but I will be very surprised if He has!"

"Let me be surprised, too!" said the General. "I haven't an idea in my head!" Then he sank into a reverie, waiting for an idea to come.

There is a power, an unspeakable power, granted to a man by a few drops of grace from above - the grace of kings, the grace of God - and both of these were granted to little George.

But we are forgetting the birthday.

Emilie's room was fragrant with flowers from her friends and playmates. On her table lay fine presents, tokens of greeting and remembrance, but not one came from George. A gift from him would not have reached her, but it was not needed, for the whole house was a souvenir of him. A memorial flower peeped out from the broom closet under the stairs, where Emilie had peeped out when the curtain was burning and George had rushed up as first fireman. When she glanced from the window the acacia tree reminded her of childhood days. The blossoms and leaves were gone, but the tree stood shrouded in frost, like a great branch of coral, and the moon shone big and clear through the branches,

unchanged though ever changing, just as it was when George shared his bread and butter with Little Emilie.

From a drawer she took out the drawings of the Czar's Kremlin and her own castle remembrances from George. As she looked at them and mused over them, many thoughts arose in her mind. She remembered the day when, unnoticed by father or mother, she had stolen down to where the Porter's wife lay on her death bed; she had sat by her side, held her hand, and heard her last words, "Blessings - George!" The mother's thoughts had been of her son. But now the words seemed to Emilie to carry a deeper meaning. In truth, George was with her on her birthday.

It so happened that the next day there was another birthday in the house, the General's, for he had been born the day after his daughter - naturally, many years earlier. Again there were presents, and among them a splendid - looking saddle, extremely comfortable and expensive; its only duplicate belonged to one of the princes. Who could have sent it? The General was in ecstasy. If the little card with it had said, "Thanks for yesterday," we could all guess where it came from, but the card said, "From one whom the General does not know."

"Who in the world is there I don't know?" said the General. "I know everybody!" And his thoughts went from one to another of the many people he knew; indeed, he knew everybody. "It is from my wife!" he said at last. "She's playing a trick on me! *Charmant!*"

But she wasn't playing a trick on him; that time was past.

Once more there was a party, but this one wasn't at the General's. It was a fancy-dress ball given by one of the princes; many of the guests wore masks.

The General went as Rubens, in a Spanish costume with a small ruff and a rapier, and carried himself well indeed. His wife was Madame Rubens, in black velvet with a high bodice that was terribly warm, and her neck in a millstone - that is to say, of course, a large ruff. She looked exactly like a Dutch painting of the General's, in which the hands were especially admired; they were an exact likeness of those of the General's wife. Emilie went as Psyche, in lace and muslin. She was a floating tuft of swan's-down; she had no need of the wings and just wore them to show she was Psyche.

It was a scene of magnificent pomp and splendor, with lights and flowers and many riches, and all in good taste. There was so much to see that one hardly had a chance to take

notice of Madame Rubens' beautiful hands.

Then a black Domino, with an acacia flower in his hood, danced by with Psyche.

"Who's that?" asked the General's wife.

"His Royal Highness," said the General. "I'm quite sure of it. I knew him immediately by his handshake."

The General's wife was doubtful.

General Rubens wasn't doubtful. He drew the black Domino aside and traced the royal initials in the palm of his hand. They were denied, but a hint was given - the motto of the saddle - "One whom the General does not know!"

"But then I do know you!" said the General. "It was you who sent me the saddle." The Domino waved his hand and disappeared among the dancers.

"Who was that black Domino you were dancing with, Emilie?" asked the General's wife.

"I didn't ask his name," she replied.

"Because you knew it! It's the Professor! Count," she continued, turning to the Count, who stood near by, "your Protégé is here; the black

Domino with the acacia flower."

"It's quite possible, your ladyship," he replied. "But, still, one of the princes is wearing the same costume."

"I know that handshake," said the General. "I received the saddle from the prince! I'm so sure I'm right that I am going to ask him to dinner."

"Do so," said the Count. "It's the prince, he'll be sure to come."

"And if it's the other he won't come," said the General, making his way to the black Domino, who was standing talking to the King. The General offered a most respectful invitation, together with hopes of a better acquaintance. He smiled confidently, for he knew quite well whom he was inviting, and he spoke loudly and distinctly.

The Domino lifted his mask, and it was George!

"Does the General repeat his invitation?" he asked.

The General drew himself up and inched, took on a stiffer bearing, took two steps backward and one step forward, as if he were dancing a minuet. All the gravity and sternness he could muster - in short, *all the General* - were in his patrician features.

"I never go back on my word - the Professor is invited!" And he bowed, with a sidelong glance at the King, who must certainly have heard everything.

And so the General gave a dinner, and his only guests were the old Count and his protégé.

"Now that I've got my foot under the table," thought George, "the foundation stone is laid."

And indeed it was; it was laid with great solemnity by the General and his wife.

The young man had come and gone and, as the General well knew, had spoken like a member of good society and been most interesting; the General had even found himself repeating his "*Charmant!*" many times. The General's wife spoke of her dinner, spoke of it to one of the highest and most important of the court ladies, and the latter asked for an invitation for herself the next time the Professor should come. So, of course, he had to be invited again. And invited he was, and came, and again he was "*Charmant.*" He could even play chess!

"He doesn't come from the cellar," said the General. "Most certainly he is some scion of nobility; there are many such, and it isn't any fault of his!"

The Professor could enter the King's house, so he could very well enter the General's; but as for taking root there - there was no talk of that - except by the whole town!

He did take root, and he grew. The dew of grace had fallen from above.

So no one was surprised that, when the Professor became State Councilor, Emilie became Madame State Councilor.

"Life is either tragedy or comedy," said the General. "In a tragedy people die; in a comedy they win each other."

And here they won each other. And they had three sturdy sons, though not all at once.

Whenever the sweet children came to see Grandfather or Grandmother, they galloped on sticks through rooms and halls. And the General rode on a stick behind them - "As a groom for the little State Councilors!" The General's wife sat on a sofa and smiled, even if she did have one of her bad headaches.

That's how far George got on in the world, and he got much farther, too; or else it wouldn't have been worth my while to tell you the story of "The Porter's Son."

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